Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2023

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Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel as their International GCSE English Literature provider. We very much hope that both our candidates and centres are delighted with their results.

Introduction

The November 2023 series was very successful and performed well. The paper was very similar in performance to previous series, particularly for Sections A and C. There were no errors in the paper, no erratum notices and there were no enquiries from centres following the examination. Centres are once again congratulated on preparing their candidates so well.

In Section A, candidates are presented with an unseen poem and answer a question based on it (20 marks). Section B, Anthology Poetry, gives candidates the choice of two poetry questions (30 marks). For Section C, Modern Prose, candidates respond to one of two questions based on the prose text that they have studied (40 marks). The total mark for this paper is 90.

The most popular prose text was, once again, *Of Mice and Men*. There were a few responses for other texts (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Whale Rider*, *The Joy Luck Club* and *Things Fall Apart*), which were often a pleasure to read.

As expected, the number of entries was much lower than in the summer, however, there were more than the January 2022 or January 2023 series. A full range of marks was awarded with most candidates gaining marks in Level 3 or above. Again, there were some extremely good responses and a number of candidates gained marks in Levels 4 and 5, particularly for their prose response. All responses were marked by the Principal Examiner and two Senior examiners.

Section A, Unseen Poem
Q1. *An Owl Flew in my Bedroom Once* by Jan Dean
Question: Explore how the writer presents the speaker's memory of an event in this poem.

Responses to this question were seen at all levels. There were some basic responses that tended to 'translate' or rephrase some of the lines from the poem, often leading with a quotation and then saying what it meant. Other low-level responses were identified through 'feature spotting', where the candidate showed little or no understanding of the meaning of the poem as a whole and where candidates made no reference to the specifics of the question.

Higher level responses really focused on the idea of memory and how this might not be reliable. Of these responses, the 'I think' at the end of the poem was something candidates seemed to enjoy, often identifying it and then interpreting the poem from the perspective of the narrator being unreliable because of this uncertainty.

Most candidates commented on the setting of the poem, and many said the certainty of the windows could be juxtaposed with the uncertainty of the experience. Higher-level candidates tended to comment on the structure and form of the poem, engaging with the fact that there was a long stanza and then the relevance of the standalone line at the end.

Many candidates evidenced the simile 'like an apple-peeler' and how this was a human and ordinary image. Fewer candidates commented on the simile 'like a see-through slate'. Higher level candidates tended to comment on the verbs, 'circled', 'floated', 'flew', etc., and the movement that each of these suggests.

Overall, candidates found the poem accessible and were able to engage with the chronological structure and the element of doubt introduced at the end.

For our exception scripts, or those that could not be marked on ePen, the examiner commented: "The vast majority of candidates were able to talk about the poet's uncertainty about the event and back this up with evidence from the poem. Most chose the lack of evidence that the owl had been there and the adding of 'I think' at the end. This allowed candidates to access L3. Better responses chose to consider the owl itself and it being 'mysterious' and the event taking place at night. Candidates were able to give their personal response and many chose the supernatural route: lots of refs linking night/dark and grey being ghost like. I liked the 'rattle of talons' linked to the chains of a ghost. Others went for the light in which the owl appeared and chose the angel aspect. All worked well. I liked the response which compared the poet to being like a detective in a crime scene looking for evidence, the magic show, and the 'unworldly'. Structure was sometimes inadvertently covered by the last line and the addition of 'I think'. Better saw it as a single last line and the cyclical nature of the poem. I thoroughly enjoyed reading these responses."

Summary:
The poem and question performed well and as intended. A full range of marks were awarded, so the poem was a good differentiator.
The quality of responses was similar to past series, with a full range of marks awarded.
The poem and question were similar in complexity, style and performance as past unseen poetry questions.

When comparing with previous series, the level of demand was similar. Key areas to consider for future series remain the same.

When responding to the Unseen Poetry, Section A, candidates should try to:

   • demonstrate an understanding of the overall meaning of the poem

   • focus on the question

   • refer to form and structure and try to suggest why this may have been used

   • give examples of language and explain their effect on the reader

   • comment on all areas of the poem, not just the first few lines

   • use short quotations and avoid copying large areas of the poem.

SECTION B, Anthology poems

Q2 Compare how the writers present their thoughts about relationships in *Sonnet 116* and *My Last Duchess*

Positive feedback has been received for this question.

Most candidates showed some secure understanding of the different interpretations of relationships in these two named poems. Candidates who used AO3 (links and connections) throughout tended to produce more focused responses. Most candidates made some reference to Shakespeare's use of the sonnet form in *Sonnet 116* and that sonnets are love poems that express genuine or true love in a relationship. More able candidates juxtaposed this with *My Last Duchess* being an exploration of an obsessive relationship that is controlling and damaging. Many candidates commented on the title and the possessiveness of 'my' and some candidates explored the idea of 'last', whether the implication was that there would not be another one or whether it referred to her being dead. Some very able candidates explored relationships with the idea of the transcendence of love, that Shakespeare suggests that love transcends time and that Browning is trying to 'fix' time through the portrait. Many candidates commented on the form of *My Last Duchess*, although comment about the use of dramatic monologue varied.

Interestingly, there was the occasional tendency to compare what the poems did not do and often these were vague, for example, 'Poem 1 did not include alliteration and neither did Poem 2'.

Responses that were not marked on ePen, such as word-processed responses or those using extra paper, tended to vary in quality. The examiner reported that "most were able to pick out the obvious comparisons i.e., both are about love. Some mentioned the sonnet form but here was an easy structure point that wasn't always grasped, though one did prefer this poem as it was short and the other too long!"

Another comment received was that "responses tended to be better on *My Last Duchess*, with a few points on *Sonnet 116* and more on *MLD*; however, most candidates were able to access L3. Most could talk about Shakespeare's certainty about love and the duke's lack of love for the duchess. Lots focused on the possessive pronoun 'My'. Better responses looked at the duke's monologue and his arrogance of talking about his last wife when looking to marry another. Most were able to discuss the demise of the duchess."

The question performed as expected and the full range of marks was awarded.
There was a reasonable balance between the chosen anthology question.

Q3 Compare the ways the writers present emotions in *Do not go gentle into that goodnight* and one other poem from the anthology.

The question worked as intended and, again, the full range of marks was awarded. The most popular second poem choice was *Piano*, although a range was seen.

Candidates appeared very familiar with *Do not go gentle into that good night* and the meaning of the poem. They were able to focus on emotions and how Dylan Thomas's desire was for his father not to die; this was an appeal to him to fight. The most popular quotation that was explored for this poem was 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light'. Some candidates used this in terms of emotion and some used it as an example of the power of repetition to explore the emotion. The most popular second poems to be chosen were *Piano* and *Poem at Thirty-Nine*. Many candidates who chose these poems to pair with *Do not go gentle into that good night* were able to look at both grief and affection in relation to the poet's parent. Candidates who chose *Poem at Thirty-Nine* often commented on paternal relationships in the two poems. After this, popular choices were *If-* and *War Photographer*. There was an occasional misunderstanding from those candidates who chose *War Photographer*, thinking that he did not care and this was occasionally used as a contrast in terms of emotions in the poems.

In the whitemail responses, there seemed to be an emerging pattern in that the candidates chose this question so that they could answer on their favourite poem. Most responses were stronger on the second choice of poem. Having said that, some more obvious comparisons/contrast were made – his father dying/her death. One more violent the other gentler. Most could discuss a couple of language points, such as the euphemism in *Do not go gentle* and the repetition of rage, rage. Although close analysis of language was not sustained, there was sufficient for a mark in Level 3.

SECTION C Modern Prose

Q4 *To Kill a Mockingbird*: How is Mayella Ewell important in the novel?

There were only a small number of responses to this question.
Most responses gained marks in the top two levels. We included one in the examiners' training pack, which gained a mark at the top of Level 4. The candidate considered a range of examples, such as the trial, the Ewell family, Mayella being a 'surrogate mother' and not keeping the children clean, getting Tom Robinson to help her, being an outcast, taking advantage of Tom, racism, feelings of loneliness and how Atticus is respectful towards her. The sustained response demonstrated a thorough understanding of the character and novel; however, more finer details could have been included, such as how Tom helps Mayella or how Bob Ewell mistreats her. More inclusion of smaller details could have secured a mark in Level 5.

The question was successful and, similar to previous series, marks were Level 3 or above.

Q5 *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Explore the theme of prejudice.
There was only a small number of responses to this question; however, a range of marks were awarded from Level 3 to full marks. Some very thoughtful and perceptive points were made. The question gave candidates plenty of opportunity to explore the theme and a range of examples were considered.

The question performed the same as previous series.

Q6 *Of Mice and Men*: In what ways is Lennie significant … ?
This was, by far, the most popular of the two *Of Mice and Men* questions. Many candidates recognised that Lennie was the character around whom the action revolved. Interestingly, in this series, a number of candidates referred to him as neuro-divergent and some even explored autism in relation to this. Generally, these types of comments added little to the response. In the lower levels there tended to be some reliance on narration and explaining all the incidents in which Lennie was involved. Higher level responses saw Lennie as a device, used by Steinbeck to explore the Great Depression, inequality, prejudice and the plight of itinerant workers. These responses were using AO4 where it naturally occurred and candidates were producing integrated responses. Candidates were very familiar with Lennie as innocent and child-like and there were many comments about Steinbeck's use of animal imagery to describe his physical characteristics. Many candidates talked about both his strength (using the text to describe his physical characteristics) and the killing of Candy's dog foreshadowing the end of the text and how the American Dream died with him. Some higher-level candidates explored how George's happiness increased with the telling of how they would live 'off the fatta the land', and how Lennie's enthusiasm had a role for George, and subsequently Candy and, for a short while, Crooks.

From the responses marked by alternative means (word-processed, for example), the senior examiner commented: "The question allowed candidates to show their understanding of character and context. The vast majority were L3 and better. Most chose The Great Depression/Wall St Crash/Dust bowl/American Dream as contextual points leading to Lennie being a migrant worker. Most discussed his mental disability and the lack of support for people with disabilities. The vast majority used direct quotes to back up points when describing Lennie, especially animal imagery. There were some sensitive readings on Lennie's strength allowing George to get jobs, his friendship with George setting them apart from the other ranch hands as they were not lonely and his naivety leading to his questioning of Crooks's isolation."

Q7 *Of Mice and Men*: Discuss the importance of settings …
The question performed well and was, on the whole, successful. This was the second most popular prose question.

Many higher-level candidates worked with the setting by the Salinas River and explored the beginning and ending of the text and the cyclical structure, the bunkhouse, Crooks' room and the barn. Some candidates took a broad approach to settings, some of which included the context and historical setting of the text. Some candidates talked through the setting chronologically, and at the lower end this tended to become descriptive, with candidates re-telling what happened in each location. Higher-level candidates explored the settings in terms of what they represented, so the river and nature, with the arrival of the water snake at the end representing the survival of the fittest. Some candidates talked about the bunkhouse in relation to 'home' and explored this in terms of the Great Depression and itinerant workers. Some also talked about how this might represent masculinity and linked this with Curley's wife. The bunk-house often allowed candidates to move onto Crooks and how discrimination and racism excluded him from this setting. Crooks' room was often used to explore loneliness and isolation, along with racism. Many candidates explored this setting for the animals and how this was how Crooks was seen by his employers and the other ranch hands. Occasional candidates mentioned Susie's place and the escapism that the ranch hands experienced there. In addition, some students recognised that the American Dream led to different setting, the dream of the George and Lennie's 'little place' and Curley's wife's dream of Hollywood.

One examiner was "surprised at the lack of understanding of the question, which should have allowed candidates to storm ahead with all the incidents that took place in the bunk house. Having said that, I did see in the exception scripts some really good answers. The vast majority did manage to place characters in situations and gain credit this way. The general setting of the time in which the novel was set allowed candidates to talk about migrant workers, Crooks and Curley's wife thus accessing L3. Better answers did specify locations such as the river bank, the bunk house, Crooks's room and the barn. (There was a fabulous full mark response in the non-standard scripts section. The detail, especially in the description of the bunk house and its importance in reflecting the lives of the workers was a joy to read.)"

Overall, the question performed well and the full range of marks was awarded. It was interesting how varied the responses were and the various interpretations of 'settings' presented. All valid points were awarded.

Q8 *The Whale Rider*: Explore the significance of travelling …
There was just one response to this question, which was included in our Standardisation pack.

This was an assured and confident response that explored a range of examples. The candidate considered how the narrative of both the whales and humans runs parallel throughout the novel. Examples of travelling included: Kahutia Te Rangi travelling to Whangara, Kahu's birth and when Nanny (Nani) Flowers and Rawiri collect her birth cord, Kahu's visits to Whangara, Rawiri's trip to Australia and Papua New Guinea, and the effects of these travels on Rawiri, the whales' travels to Whangara and how Kahu rides the bull whale. The final paragraph considered how far Koro has travelled in his thinking when coming to accept Kahu. This was an assured and perceptive response.

It is hard to judge the success of a question with just one response, but as this one response scored full marks, we must assume that the question offered the same opportunities as in past series.

Q9 *The Whale Rider*: How is Nanny (Nani) Flowers presented … ?
There were only a small number of responses to this question.
Responses were mostly given marks in Level 3 and Level 4. The majority were sustained and demonstrated a thorough understanding of the character and novel. A range of points were made. Nanny was identified as being: strong, not submissive, clever, brave, an equal (or better) to Koro, having authority, loving, amusing, supportive, wise and 'always right'. More explicit contextual points could have been made, but candidates often referred to Maori traditions.

The question performed well and candidates were successful. The question and results compare similarly with previous series.

Q10 and Q11 *The Joy Luck Club*
There was just one response to 'Explore the theme of hopes and dreams', but there were no responses to Q11, the importance of Lindo Jong.

Q12 *Things Fall Apart*: Explore tragic events …
There were some very interesting responses to this question.
One candidate provided a sustained, thoughtful response that demonstrated a thorough understanding of the novel and theme. The candidate began with reference to Yeats' poem and went on to explore the tragic events of Ikemefuna's death, Okonkwo accidentally killing Ezeudu's son and consequent exile, the tragedy of colonisation, Okonkwo's demise and the tragedy of Okonkwo's shameful death.

Most candidates provided a sustained, thoughtful response that demonstrated a thorough understanding of the novel and theme (Level 4).

At times more reference to the question could have been made; however, candidates did well with this question and it performed as expected.

Q13 *Things Fall Apart*: Discuss the character of Unoka and his effect on others …
There were only a small number of responses to this question and some were rather brief or lacking development or a suffecent range of examples. For example, one candidate provided a brief response, which commented on how Okonkwo is determined to be Unoka's opposite and how it leads Okonkwo 'ruling his house with a heavy hand'. There was a brief reference to Igbo society, but the brevity of the response hindered progress.

Most candidates made some reference to context, even if only considering Igbo society and traditions. The question appears to have performed as expected, but the small number of responses makes overall judgements more difficult.

Summary

In comparison with previous series, the Prose (Novels) questions performed in a similar way. A full range of marks was awarded, particularly for the most popular texts. The questions followed a similar style and there were no new phrases or alternative wordings to the question stems.

Feedback has been positive throughout and we were impressed with the majority of the responses seen.

As in previous series, a summary follows:
Students that did well in the Poetry section
- thought about the deeper meaning of the poem(s)
- explored language form and structure skillfully
- analysed and integrated language form and structure points together, rather than in separate paragraphs
- provided a balanced exploration of both poems when comparing the Anthology poems
- considered the effect on the reader.

For the Prose section,
Candidates that did well:
- used evidence, such as short memorised quotations, paraphrasing, and referred to a range of specific examples or episodes within the chosen novel
- had a good knowledge of the context and how it impacted the text
- weaved context into the essay, rather than bulking it on at the end
- answered the question clearly.

Candidates that did less well:
- had less knowledge of the text
- had not provided enough examples
- provided narrative responses
- bulked on too much context at the beginning or at the end of paragraphs, or did not explicitly refer to context.

Interestingly, the points above are similar to those mentioned in previous centre reports, which supports the belief that overall, the performance of the paper was very similar to past series.

The paper performed as intended and provided equal opportunities for all candidates. All Prose questions performed as intended and none stood out as more challenging as others.

Conclusion
As always, the responses are a pleasure to mark and have, once again, been very enjoyable to read.

Centres should be congratulated on preparing their candidates for the examination. As always, we very much hope that you will continue to deliver this specification and that you and your students are delighted with results.

Do look at our website for more details about the Summer 2024 examinations and for the latest updates. We are currently looking at adding two new prose texts to the options, which we are hoping to introduce in September 2024. All details will be made available on our website.

In addition, we have introduced online examination opportunities. Again, please do check our website for information.

From Summer 2024, we are introducing modular papers (4WET1 and 4WET2). These are identical in style and structure as the traditional 4ET1 01 / 4ET1 02 papers. Paper 1 modular examinations include different Anthology poetry questions to those appearing in the main paper. Modular Paper 2 has alternative questions for Section B.

For those candidates looking to continue their English Literature studies, the Pearson Edexcel International AS and A Level (Specification references: YET01 and XET01) are ideal options. These qualifications are becoming very popular and successful and have received positive feedback from centres. Full details are available on our website.

Again, thank you for choosing Pearson Edexcel as your International GCSE provider. We should like to wish you all every success for the future.

Thank you.
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